

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 1776

Introduced by Assembly Member Fong
(Coauthors: Senators Evans and Leno)

February 17, 2012

An act to amend Section 422.5 of, and to add Chapter 29.5 (commencing with Section 7593.5) to Division 7 of Title 1 of, the Government Code, relating to state government.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1776, as introduced, Fong. State government: Western Pacific leatherback sea turtle.

(1) Existing law establishes the state flag and the state's emblems, including, among other things, the poppy as the official state flower, the California redwood as the official state tree, and the California desert tortoise as the official state reptile.

This bill would establish the Western Pacific leatherback sea turtle as the official state marine reptile.

(2) Existing law designates certain periods of time for specified purposes, including, among other things, the first week in January as Braille Literacy Week.

This bill would designate October 15, 2012, and every October 15 thereafter, as Western Pacific Leatherback Sea Turtle Conservation Day. This bill would encourage public schools, state and federal agencies, nongovernmental agencies, fishers, whale-watch tour operators, and other interested stakeholders to engage in certain activities, as specified.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: no.
State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

1 SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the
2 following:

3 (a) California is a coastal state that is dedicated to the protection
4 of ocean resources, fisheries, and marine wildlife.

5 (b) Sea turtles, fish, and marine mammals are a central
6 component of California's natural heritage and marine biodiversity.

7 (c) The Legislature acknowledges that the Pacific leatherback
8 turtle population has experienced a catastrophic decline over the
9 past two decades and might be on the verge of extirpation.

10 (d) The Legislature further acknowledges that Pacific
11 leatherbacks are among the most imperiled of any sea turtle
12 population in any ocean basin on Earth and that populations of the
13 Pacific leatherback, a 100-million-year-old species that outlived
14 the dinosaurs, have declined by approximately 90 percent in the
15 last 25 years.

16 (e) Leatherbacks foraging off the coast of California are part of
17 a distinct Western Pacific breeding stock that nests on beaches in
18 Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands.

19 (f) California's coastal waters are high-use foraging areas for
20 summer nesters from this critically endangered population of
21 Western Pacific leatherback sea turtles, according to the National
22 Marine Fisheries Service.

23 (g) Satellite tracking conducted over the past decade has
24 determined that after nesting hundreds of individual Western
25 Pacific leatherback sea turtles swim more than 6,000 miles over
26 10 to 12 months to cross the Pacific to feed on jellyfish in
27 California coastal waters every year.

28 (h) The leatherbacks' trans-Pacific migration involved multiple
29 years of migrating between California coastal waters during the
30 summer and lower latitude wintering areas without returning to
31 western Pacific nesting beaches.

32 (i) These movements and foraging strategies underscore the
33 importance of and the need for ecosystem-based management and
34 coordinated Pacificwide conservation efforts.

35 (j) The Legislature supports efforts to recover and preserve the
36 Western Pacific leatherback sea turtle population in oceanic feeding
37 and migration areas, which are identified as important strategies
38 for their continued survival.

(k) On February 26, 2012, the National Marine Fisheries Service designated more than 16,000 square miles of California's coastal waters, and a total of nearly 42,000 square miles along the United States West Coast, as critical habitat to protect high-use foraging areas and primary prey species for the endangered Western Pacific leatherback sea turtle under the federal Endangered Species Act.

SEC. 2. Section 422.5 of the Government Code is amended to read:

422.5. (a) The California desert tortoise (~~gopherus-agassizi~~ *agassizii*) is the official state reptile.

(b) *The Western Pacific leatherback sea turtle (dermochelys coriacea) is the official state marine reptile.*

SEC. 3. Chapter 29.5 (commencing with Section 7593.5) is added to Division 7 of Title 1 of the Government Code, to read:

CHAPTER 29.5. WESTERN PACIFIC LEATHERBACK SEA TURTLE

7593.5. (a) October 15, 2012, and every October 15 thereafter, is hereby designated as Western Pacific Leatherback Sea Turtle Conservation Day.

(b) The Legislature encourages California public schools to include Western Pacific leatherback sea turtles into their teaching lessons and curriculum whenever possible.

(c) The Legislature encourages state and federal agencies, nongovernmental agencies, fishers, whale-watch tour operators, and other interested stakeholders to establish and participate in a statewide, voluntary leatherback sea turtle watch to record sightings of the Western Pacific leatherback sea turtle in California and West Coast waters.

(d) The Legislature encourages state and federal agencies to build cooperative relationships with the island nations where Western Pacific leatherback sea turtles return to nest in order to increase awareness and conservation of this critically endangered species.